

Co-chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Currey, Ranking Members Representative McCarty and Representative Berthel, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Steven Tatum. I am a resident of Hartford and have been a teacher in Hartford Public Schools since 2018. I am testifying in support of SB 1095: An Act Concerning School Resource Officers because it would make a small but important improvement to our education system that better fits the needs of raising young people in our state today.

Students don't learn well unless they feel safe, secure, and positively engaged in their schools. Teachers teach their best when there is a positive climate in their schools and their classrooms. In my experience teaching in the years since the pandemic, I have witnessed a significant increase in the numbers of students who need extra support to engage with peers and their learning in positive ways. These increased social and emotional needs combined with increased pressure to meet academic goals have left schools overburdened and in need of increased resources to continue to provide a high quality education to every student.

In times of crisis, it's tempting to fall back on familiar means of enforcing norms and expectations. For generations, schools have relied on punitive discipline modeled on the broader criminal justice system. Some school systems have sought the support from actual police officers as "school resource officers." While these officers have made contributions to their school communities, they tend to reproduce the inequitable outcomes of the criminal justice system because those are the systems they are trained to uphold. [Comprehensive research and analysis](#) conducted by Connecticut Voices for Children finds no evidence that resource officers actually improve school safety; indeed, they find a "detrimental impact of SRO presence in schools, particularly for students of color." In desperate need of short term climate improvements, I fear our educational institutions will rely on punitive and exclusionary discipline that we know have a long term negative impact on students and communities.

We can respond another way. Passing SB 1095 would be an easy, incremental step toward a new system of support and accountability for students. By mandating training in alternatives to outdated punitive exclusionary discipline and expanding the professional training that someone filling that role could have beyond criminal justice, schools will build capacity to respond to student needs in deeper and more healing ways. The long term benefits of using restorative justice approaches in combination with behavioral health resources would allow schools to repair, rather than reproduce, harm and build stronger, more inclusive communities across the state.

I strongly urge you to pass SB 1095 out of committee and onto the legislature. Shifts like these give me hope for the potential of our public education system to respond to these trying times.

Thank you for your time and for your support for making Connecticut's public education system more equitable.

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